

**John Calvin in missiological perspective:
on church unity and social justice**

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Abstract

This article offers a limited missiological perspective on the thinking of John Calvin pertaining to the issues of the unity of the church and social justice. On the question of the unity of the church, his use of the mother metaphor is looked at and as far as social justice is concerned, the relation between rich and poor is cursorily explored. The study proceeds by asking pertinent questions on the relevance and implications for the Reformed churches in South Africa of Calvin's thinking on the above-mentioned matters. The question is posed whether the celebration of the 500th birthday of the reformer is not an opportune moment for the launching of a new confessing movement among Reformed Christians in the land. A proposal is made for organising such a movement around the pastoral cycle with its four steps of insertion, context analysis, theological reflection and planning.

The object would be

"... not to restore its worn-out form, but once more to catch hold of the Calvinistic principles, in order to embody them in such a form as, suiting the requirements of our own century, may restore the needed unity of Protestant thought and the lacking energy of Protestant practical life"

Let us remember that

"... despotism has found no more invincible antagonists and liberty of conscience, no braver, no more resolute champions than the followers of Calvin" (Abraham Kuyper in his Stone lecture on Calvinism and Religion, Princeton University, 1898).

Introduction

This article is a discourse relating to a publication of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the John Knox International Reformed Center entitled *The Legacy of John Calvin* (Nyomi 2008) (with the rather interesting subtitle *Some actions for the Church in the 21st Century*) in celebration of the 500th centenary of the birth of Calvin on 10 July 1509. Although this is perhaps uncommon in an academic article, the piece is dedicated to the memory of Lukas Vischer as a manner of responding to the invitation in the very publication under discussion here: to pause and to give thanks for the life of Lukas Vischer.

The main themes emerging in the publication are the unity of the church, social justice and violence and war as reflected in the teachings or Institutes, commentaries and sermons of the reformer. All three themes remain topical in Christian mission in general and the academic discipline of Missiology in particular. For the purposes of this article, the issues of unity and justice are selected for missiological treatment.

The subtitle of the publication reveals that it is possible to read someone who lived five centuries ago in a manner that is relevant for today and that inspires to action. The introduction of a missiological perspective on Calvin feeds into this kind of contextual hermeneutic where some issues which people or the church or theology are grappling with in the 21st century become the lens through which texts from earlier times are read and interpreted. There is a type of two-pronged hermeneutic here: making meaning and finding meaning (Brueggemann 2008). To be explicit therefore, the article is an attempt to make missiological meaning out of Calvin's thinking in the sixteenth century, precisely by finding meaning in his texts.

Calvin and mission

Perhaps there is one question that needs to be settled immediately, namely that the study is not about proving or showing whether Calvin was missionary minded or not. There have been some very fine attempts at revealing Calvin's concern for the world and the church's calling to take the gospel to the world. Some fresh examples are Coleman's (2009:28-33) treatment of a selection of Calvin's sermons which clearly reveals a particular understanding of mission, Stewart (2009) who deals with the under-representation of mission in Calvinism or Protestantism at large and a fine interpretation by Mc Kee (2009:130-140) of Calvin's understanding of 1 Timothy 2:1-2, with specific reference to the reformer's teaching that Christians should pray "for all people who live on earth". It has to be said, however, that Mc Kee's interpretation is perhaps more implicitly than explicitly missionary or missiological.

Organisation of the article

The study proceeds in a fairly straightforward manner. First, the issue of a “missiological perspective” is clarified somewhat. Second, Calvin’s interpretation of the unity of the church is dealt with in terms of finding meaning and making meaning. Third, his thoughts on social justice with a focus on economic justice come in for scrutiny, again in terms of finding meaning and making meaning. Fourth, the article concludes with a proposal on a broad confessing movement in South Africa consisting of Reformed Christians across denominations with a commitment to unity and justice.

A missiological perspective

A retired colleague from the Department of Practical Theology at Unisa, Johan Wolfaardt, always poked fun at Missiology in submitting the topics of our Master’s and Doctoral students for scrutiny and approval by the Admissions Committee of the former Faculty of Theology at Unisa. What amused Wolfaardt was that expressions like “a missiological perspective” or “a missionary perspective” were tagged onto so many topics, whether they fitted or not.

There is a constant need to clarify this term in case it degenerates into vagueness and comes to operate as nothing more than a stop gap. The other extreme would be to try to give a clinical definition each time the term is called into service. The simple issue is that there is no such clinical, all-encompassing definition of the concept.

For the present it need only be said that a missiological perspective is a particular interpretive approach which engages the Bible as a missionary book. It is a faith perspective which sees the Trinitarian God as a God in mission who responds to the humanly constructed world in terms of re-describing (Brueggemann 2008) it and indeed changing it. The church, as one of the signs of how the Trinitarian God is constantly working at manifesting and establishing God’s reign in the world, is called upon to be a church in mission by equally re-describing and reconstructing reality.

In simple terms, therefore, the challenge in reading and interpreting Calvin missiologically is to see whether theological ideas expounded in the sixteenth century could be called into service in deconstructing, re-describing and changing the church and the world of the 21st century.

When I approached Den Hollander (2009), who is currently a staff member in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), dealing with mission related issues, with the question whether she thinks it is a proper hermeneutic to try to read Calvin missiologically, the electronic response was quite fascinating.

I think there is enough in Calvin to justify this as long as you, as it were, applied the contemporary concept of what mission is (our response to God to share in God's mission) to Calvin's thinking rather than looking at him for what he said about "mission"- for he did not use the word apparently. But what Calvin dealt with (justice, the price of bread, looking after the poor, giving God glory etc.) is part of mission, definitely.

While it must be conceded that any perspective on Calvin located in terms of time and place in the 21st century will be narrow, the following anecdote is called into service. The disclaimer is perhaps necessary in the light of an interesting experience recently where I was called by someone from the Free State in South Africa to complain about what he perceived to be my misrepresentation of Calvin. His complaint was based on a seven hundred and twenty word pamphlet I had published in one of the Afrikaans newspapers. In the short article the lives of Calvin and Mandela are brought into some discourse with one another by showing how the issues of unity, social justice and human brokenness were common questions in their lives, albeit perhaps from hugely different perspectives and indeed vast distances in terms of time and geographical location. In the brief conversation with the caller from the Free State, I was told about the terrible downside of Calvin's life and how he was responsible for the death of a number of people because of his authoritarian and intolerant nature. Nothing was said, however, about Calvin's creative use of the metaphor of mother in interpreting the unity of the church and his prophetic witness against the rich in his stance on social justice, both issues that had been raised in the short article. The equalisation factor between the two, that is the issues on Calvin raised by the caller and the issues highlighted in the article mentioned, is that both represent very narrow perspectives on Calvin. I concede therefore that what will be appraised in this article is a small drop in the ocean of Calvin's writings in his Institutes on the Christian Religion, commentaries and sermons.

Broad philosophical context

The term "philosophical context" is perhaps a misnomer, but it is used here to show awareness of the fact that the strength of Calvin's thinking is his remarkable integration of issues. His thinking on economic and social matters should therefore not be regarded as an appendix to the main body of his philosophical and theological reflection, but as part and parcel of his thesis that all of life is to be brought under the reign of God. In her piece on *The character and significance of John Calvin's teaching on social and economic issues*, Mc Kee (2007:3-24) gives extensive evidence of the interwovenness of social and economic themes with Calvin's Biblical and Practical Theolo-

gy, Christian life and Christian freedom and a range of other issues, including worship and the Church Constitution and ministries. In his interpretation, for example, of Calvin's concept of money, Biéler (1964:27-28) argues the following:

If we consider closely not only the thought but also the personal activity of Calvin as well, and if we look not at a mere portion of his thought and action but rather at their totality, we shall realize that the work of this master may be defined as a social personalism ... wanted to guarantee fully the brotherhood (*sic*) and solidarity which unite men (*sic*) one to the other in Christ.

Calvinism is a "complete worldview" in Bratt's (2007:80) interpretation of Kuyper for whom there was no contradiction between being a theologian and being a politician. Once again, the understanding of Calvin and therefore the interpretation of Calvinism by someone like Kuyper, is that the whole of life falls under the reign of God and is in need of thoroughgoing transformation (cf Kuyper's Stone lectures delivered at Princeton University in 1898).

Money for Calvin was not merely a monetary issue, but very much a religious issue in the double sense of the word. First, as a gift from God and second as an issue of huge responsibility and a test of our relationship with others, in particular the poor.

Calvin's interpretation of the unity of the church

In drawing on the publication *The legacy of John Calvin* four impulses on the unity of the church are highlighted, namely the use of the "mother" metaphor, the indivisibility of Christ, the need for a holy or pious conspiracy among believers and what could be seen as a distinct missiological impulse with reference to Calvin's interpretation of John 17:21.

Before proceeding to a specific treatment of each of these elements, it would almost be an understatement to say that for Calvin the church is strictly one, that the true church is ONE, not many (Kuiper 2009:14). In clarifying the context, Kuiper goes on to argue that the ecclesiastical context for Calvin differed greatly from ours. We are faced with a situation of progressive multi-denominationalism which was non-existent for Calvin. In a sense his context enabled him to see the oneness of the church more clearly than we do. For Christians living partly in the 20th and partly in the 21st centuries, which have seen the proliferation of churches, the argument could quite easily be that since all are more or less at fault, it does not really matter what church one belongs to. For Calvin the church is strictly one. Whether the distinction between the invisible church and the visible church is helpful is

another matter, since there is a thin line between differentiation and creating a dichotomy. However, in Kuiper's understanding "Calvin knew full well that the invisible church and the visible church are not two, but one" (Kuiper 2009:14).

Perhaps it would make sense to show awareness of the fact that despite his radical break with the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin did not transcend the notion that outside the church there is no salvation. In fact, Calvin says so in so many words when he writes:

Beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation can be hoped for ... The paternal favor of God and the special evidence of spiritual life are confined to his peculiar people, and hence the abandonment of the Church is always fatal (Institutes IV, 1, 4).

Equally problematic was his understanding of church-state relationships. For most Christians living in the 21st century there is a perceived need for a healthy critical distance between church and state. This is the way in which our understanding of the matter has evolved over centuries, particularly in the light of the disastrous consequences of the *Corpus Christianum* to which the notion of a state church is not entirely alien. Based on the theological understanding of Christ as the head of the church, a separation between church and state is almost taken for granted. For Calvin, in his context, the situation was different. His understanding was that it was the task of magistrates "to cherish and support the external worship of God, to preserve the pure doctrine of religion, to defend the constitution of the church" (Institutes IV, XX, 2).

There is no need to elaborate on the issues of no salvation outside the church and the role ascribed to magistrates by Calvin in preserving the doctrine and constitution of the church. They are alluded to merely show that Calvin was right and wrong in his conception of the church. Right in understanding the church as one and wrong as far as the two above-mentioned matters are concerned. The issue of the magistrates was of course counterbalanced by Calvin's advocacy of rebellion against corrupt and unjust worldly rulers and authorities.

I shall now discuss the four issues highlighted at the beginning of this chapter.

The church as mother: finding and making meaning

One of the most delightful discoveries in reading Calvin on his understanding of the church or more particularly the unity of the church is the manner in which he calls into service the metaphor of mother. It is a very Biblical thing

to do since almost everything in the Bible is communicated through images, metaphors, myths and stories. It is also a very postmodern thing to do in terms of the expansion of rationality to include all of the foregoing and more in trying not so much to arrive at watertight definitions but to facilitate better understanding or to make meaning.

But back to Calvin who writes as follows:

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh we become like angels (Institutes IV, 1, 4).

In the publication *The legacy of John Calvin* the controversy around the latter part of Institutes IV, 1, 4, which suggests that there is no salvation outside the church, is seemingly avoided by omitting to cite it. The intention here is not to engage the omission, but rather to affirm the use of the “mother” metaphor. The implications of the metaphor for the unity of the church are clear. If indeed the church is our mother, why are the children of this mother so divided and torn apart, eating at separate tables and drinking from poisoned wells instead of feasting at the breast of the mother where sweet milk is to be found? Also, if the church is the mother, why then is the church throughout the world more a reflection of patriarchy and male chauvinism than a place where everybody finds nourishment, care and guidance?

There are a number of implications for the Reformed churches in a country like South Africa, emanating from the understanding of church unity in terms of the “mother” metaphor. First, if the church as a whole is understood to be a mother, then any idea of a particular denominational church being a mother church is deconstructed by implication. For more than a century in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was spoken of as the “mother church” as an issue of both self-identification and internalised paternalism on the part of the black Reformed churches. This was so as a matter of discourse, feeding into the theological, liturgical, structural and financial dominance of the DRC over the black Reformed churches. A new interpretation of Calvin and his use of the mother metaphor could potentially open up new avenues for the understanding of church unity. For Reformed Christians worldwide, the consequence of seeing the church as mother could be a fundamental shift from patriarchy and male chauvinism in the church to the inculcation of an almost new ecclesiology, understanding the church in narrative terms as a place where people go for nourishment, care and

guidance, as a location where food in abundance is to be found for oneself, but particularly also to feed the poor and the hungry.

To prolong the reflection on the Reformed churches in South Africa, let us consider the following: What are the implications of understanding the unity of the church as the oneness of the mother for the DRC family of churches? In simple terms, to stop breaking the mother's heart by refusing to come and sit around her table as sisters and brothers. The eldest brother, Jesus Christ, who has had his body broken and torn apart for the sake of the unity of the church is waiting in agony to make the DRC family of churches feast from the wonderful table he has prepared for them. By constantly refusing to come, they are not worthy of the little word "family" in the concept "DRC family of churches".

In Calvin's own understanding:

Each time we read the word "one", let us be reminded that it is used emphatically. Christ cannot be divided. Faith cannot be rent. There are not various baptisms, but one, which is common to all. God cannot be torn into different parts (Commentary on Ephesians 4:5, Calvini Opera, LI, 191).

The unification of the DRC family of churches, ultimately, will be an answer to the prayer of Jesus himself. Calvin (CO XLVII, 387) makes a profound comment on John 17:21 where Jesus prays that *all may be one* by referring to "the end of our happiness as consisting in unity". Calvin goes on to say that "the ruin of the human race is, that having been alienated from God, it is also broken and scattered in itself. The restoration of it, therefore, on the contrary, consists in its being properly united in one body ..."

Calvin uses the expression "the world is scattered" in trying to analyse the state of the world in the sixteenth century. In his understanding the scattered disposition of the world results from separation from Christ. In returning very briefly to Reformed churches in South Africa, the missiological challenge is clear: the DRC family of churches can only render a credible witness to Jesus, the Messiah, if separation on the grounds of race and ethnicity is overcome. The requirement, again, is that they unite in a non-racial, non-sexist Reformed church. While this will not solve everything it will provide a firm foundation for seeking greater unity with all churches in the country and worldwide. A further issue is that by uniting once and for all, the DRC family of churches will contribute to offsetting what the *Legacy of John Calvin* identifies as a trend towards fragmentation.

Calvin's understanding of social justice: finding and making meaning

Nowhere else is Calvin's economic and social thinking examined more thoroughly and critically than by the Swiss theologian and economist, Biéler (2005) in a publication entitled *Calvin's economic and social thought*. Scholars like Dommen (2009:19-29), who draws on Biéler, and Freudenberg (2009:153-172) are contributing to the debate in their own right. It has to be said also that the publication under discussion in this article on the *Legacy of John Calvin* draws equally from the research done by Biéler.

Before proceeding with the discussion, a disclaimer with particular reference to the very complex question of whether Calvin could justifiably be identified as the theological father of capitalism and Calvinism as the bed-rock of the system is avoided here, except to say that Biéler (2005:423-454) treats the matter quite extensively in his book in chapter VI (entitled "Calvinism and Capitalism").

This discussion proceeds along the lines of what is presented in the publication, *The legacy of John Calvin*. There is a missiologically strategic motivation for proceeding in this manner which in simple terms has to do with the accessibility of ideas for church members in the Reformed tradition.

Rich people, poor people

In a sermon on Matthew 3:9-10, Calvin (CO XLVI, 552) warns the rich not to "be like wild beasts to eat and gobble up the poor and suck their blood and their substance – but should rather help them and always look on them with fairness ... For otherwise they are like murderers if they see their neighbours wasting away and yet do not open their hands to help them. In this, I tell you, they are certainly like murderers".

In order to understand Calvin's concern for social justice with reference to the relationship between rich and poor, it is necessary to look briefly at the prevailing conditions in Geneva during the time of the Reformation. In chapter 2 of his book, Biéler (2005:122-157) describes and analyses in detail economic life and the social reforms during the Calvinist Reformation. In summary, the Geneva of Calvin the Reformer, like other parts of Europe, saw the influx of money and precious metals, the latter being procured mainly by the Portuguese and the Spaniards. The Portuguese plundered the west coast of Africa for gold and their neighbours benefited from the conquest of Mexico. "Spanish gold" was poured into Europe and France in particular benefited. The gold and silver that poured into Europe triggered a monetary revolution with serious consequences, one of which was the depreciation of the currencies of certain countries that had not profited from the influx of precious metals. Another consequence was the rise in prices of goods. Biéler (2005:127) observes:

This rise was even more pronounced at Geneva through the influx of the refugees and the shortage of foodstuffs their presence created, constituted the most characteristic mark of social life in Calvin's day. We find countless references to it in his sermons and in official documents, and it was the source of many measures such as the sumptuary laws.

Biéler goes on to point to numerous other aspects in the economic and social developments in Europe in the sixteenth century, consistently highlighting the developments around Geneva with reference to the reformation and Calvin's role in it. He shows how the influx of precious metals and the resultant monetary revolution led to feverish speculation, dubious business practices and the love of gambling. He also shows how the masters in the craft guilds tried to consolidate their position with a form of protectionism that resulted in the emergence of a working proletariat whose fate was worsened by a reduction in salary of two-thirds over a seventy-five year period. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of the proletariat, destroying the social equilibrium of society and creating poverty and destitution (Pirenne in Biéler 2005:129). It is against this background, says Biéler (2005:129), that is the extent of the economic and social imbalance, that Calvin's zealous desire to bring about social reforms and combat the dangers of wealth should be understood.

Consequently the Refomer's preaching made the air resound with gospel teaching matching the evils of the age: the dangers of wealth and the damage caused by destitution.

In his commentaries and sermons especially Calvin addressed himself to the issue of social justice. In *The legacy of John Calvin* Nyomi draws from his commentary on the five books of Moses (Exodus 16:19) to highlight the idea that God's gifts belongs to all:

(A fair distribution) can become reality if the rich do not greedily swallow up whatsoever they can get together; if they do not rake up on every side what belongs to others to satisfy their greed; if they do not gorge themselves upon the hunger and want of the poor, if they do not, as far as in them lies, stifle the blessing of God; in a word, if they do not accumulate great heaps as their intemperance drives them, but are liberal out of their present abundance ...

Authors like Dommen (2009:19-20), who draws on Calvin's sermons on Isaiah 23:17-18 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19 and Freudenberg (2009:158-161),

who draws from sermons on Deuteronomy 15:11-15, Deuteronomy 24:14-18 and 24:19-24, have convincingly shown the extent to which context informed Calvin's preaching on social issues. Dommen infers that "communication" has a particular significance for the reformer, who "insists on the essential role of conversing, exchanging, trading, passing things on to those who need them". All of this, argues Dommen, all these activities, were called into service to define "the humanity of humanity".

Freudenberg for his part, on the basis of the sermons alluded to, finds that Calvin (CO 28, p190) reveals a soft spot for the poor in stating that "the cries of the poor (must) rise up to heaven, and we must not think to be found without guilt before God". Freudenberg (2009:160-161) then goes on to indicate the five aspects emphasised by Calvin in his sermon on Deuteronomy 24:19-24. First, that there is a close relationship between the rich and the poor before God with the former being entrusted with possessions and the latter being allowed to participate in these resources. Second, that the gifts bestowed upon people by God connect them to God as the giver in a covenant characterised by gratitude. Third, the rich are confronted with the dangers of avarice, miserliness, high-handedness and a lack of gratitude. Calvin has unmasked these dangers as sin. Fourth, based on the creation of all human beings in the image of God, Calvin displayed an understanding that the poor and the rich should live in communion in the Church of Christ. Fifth, for Calvin the very basis of charity is the understanding that all human beings, if the interpretation is correct, stand with empty hands before God and new life, instituted in Jesus Christ, has been granted to all.

In *The legacy of John Calvin*, Calvin's concern for social justice is drawn into a creative tension with his respect for God's creation. The latter issue is brought into a sharp theological focus by suggesting that it is not only an ecological and economic matter, but a question of human beings destroying the joy God has in his own creation (Nyomi 2008:29). In commenting on Psalm 104:31, Calvin writes:

"Let the Lord rejoice in his works" is not superfluous, for he desires that the order, which God has established from the beginning, may be continued in the lawful use of his gifts. As we read in Gen 6:6 that "The Lord repented that he had made man on earth" so when he sees that the good things which he bestows are polluted by our corruption, he ceases to take delight in bestowing them ...

In reflecting on the implications of Calvin's teachings on social justice and the relationship between rich and poor for Reformed Christians in South Africa, the following issues come to mind. First, there is a need for advocacy in the form of conscientisation on the dangerous situation relating to the ever

widening gap between rich and poor and the growing socioeconomic inequalities. South Africans do not need sophisticated measuring instruments like the Gini-coefficient to draw their attention to the discrepancies. They are objectively clear. Life in South Africa speaks for itself. Indeed, no Marxist criticism of religion is needed when life itself, the daily lives of millions of poor people, is the sharpest criticism of the church and of religion.

A second issue which is inspired by the Calvin legacy is perhaps not only to develop a better understanding of the situation, but to work for justice in the economy as suggested in *The legacy of John Calvin*. In fact, Reformed Christians are called upon to join the *Covenanting for justice movement* which is grounded in the Accra Confession.

Busch (2007:74) points out that in his prophetic task in Geneva Calvin concentrated largely on refugees. The social solidarity of Geneva residents during the time of Calvin was put under severe stress by the arrival in the city of foreigners from France initially and later also from England and Italy. A practical question according to Busch that had to be answered by Calvin and the Reformed Christians of Geneva was whether strangers, refugees who had been expelled from their countries of origin because of their support for the Reformation, were their neighbours. There were naturally a number of practical issues such as overcrowding in Geneva and the question of the refugees' livelihood. Calvin's response seems to have been a categorical statement that even if they were not able to speak a word to one another, they were still called upon to live together in a family of brothers and sisters which Christ had founded in his blood. A third issue for Reformed Christians in South Africa is the question of the relation between South Africans and strangers from the neighbouring countries. Do we have a strong enough theology of the stranger or is it a strange concept?

Unity and justice: a new confessing movement

Is one of the strategic implications of trying to find new meaning in the teachings of Calvin by reading him missiologically possibly the launching of a new confessing movement among Reformed Christians in South Africa? The celebration of the 500th centenary of the birth of Calvin is indeed a suggestive moment which might inspire and energise Reformed Christians to reflect in new ways on their identity and to act upon such reflection. Has the missionary élan of the DRC family of churches evaporated with the end of the mission of the DRC or is there a new impetus, a refreshing energy?

In South Africa Reformed Christians have the Confession of Belhar as a guiding star in their quest for unity, reconciliation and justice and the Confession or Declaration of Accra as a basis for the search for economic and ecological justice. Will Reformed Christians in South Africa indeed be

part of the Earth community or the Household of Life as envisaged in the Confession of Accra?

How do we deal with these issues?

I want to propose that the new confessing movement of Reformed Christians in South Africa should be planned strategically on the basis of the pastoral cycle as it originated with the two Jesuit missionaries, Holland and Henriot (1980). The cycle, in very brief terms, consists of four steps, namely insertion, context analysis, theological reflection and planning. It contains all the elements of the classical, judge, act or action-reflection methodology.

Insertion

The very first step in the evolution of a new confessing movement in South Africa is the telling of stories. As a wonderful movement of the Spirit and in trying to make meaning of the text from Acts 2 that male and female, old and young from every race or cultural background will tell stories and share dreams and visions and perhaps also their fears, the new confessing movement in South Africa should be characterised by its grace to create space for the telling of stories. As long as stories are privatised and kept closed, no new meaning will be created. If Lucie-Smith (2007) is understood correctly regarding his notion of stories having the potential to open up infinite possibilities of new meaning and interpretation, story-telling will hopefully lead to refreshingly and surprisingly new discoveries among Reformed Christians in South Africa. What we need is not so much a prescribed, structured Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but a free movement of Christians wherever new stories can be told in safe spaces. Such a movement will contribute tremendously to a new understanding of Calvinism as a movement based not on orthodoxy but on orthopraxis. It should be based not so much on what we say, but on what we do among the poorest of the poor and what we allow them to do to us, helping us to be “reformed” or at best to be radically transformed.

Context analysis

In *Why do we celebrate Calvin's legacy in 2009?* Smit (2009) adds his voice to the discussion, making a very basic analysis of peculiarly South African challenges and opportunities:

The Reformed community in South Africa has a deeply ambiguous history.

During the present transformation of society, the Reformed tradition faces major opportunities and challenges: the opportunity to embody its own unity more visibly through renewal of its own structures and order, through common worship and confession and through shared life and service, thereby overcoming destructive divisions from the past; the opportunity to proclaim and practice real reconciliation, thereby dealing with alienation and pain of yesterday and distance and distrust of today; the opportunity to witness publicly, through word and deeds, to God's compassionate justice, both through its own discipleship and by calling on state, society and public opinion, thereby addressing both legacies of injustice as well as contemporary challenges of poverty, suffering, HIV/Aids, denial of human dignity, violence and crime; calling to do all this together with others in the ecumenical church, in society at large and on our own continent.

I want to suggest that such analysis should form the basis for discussion among Reformed Christians in South Africa as they embark upon the difficult journey of understanding their situation better. How do they read the signs of the times? If the telling of stories is negotiated properly and safe spaces are indeed created for story-tellers, narrative might greatly enrich context analysis.

Theological reflection

If some of the logic and coherence of the pastoral cycle is to be maintained, not in a technocratic manner, but for creating mission strategies, I want to suggest that in allowing our insertion and context analysis to inform our theological reflection, the focus needs to be on the poor. Why? In very simple terms: God is the God of the poor and Jesus is the Jesus of the poor. Or, as stated in section 1 of the report of the Melbourne Conference: "In the perspective of the kingdom, God has a preference for the poor" (Matthey 1980:171). The Melbourne report goes on to project an image of God as the one who "identified with the poor and oppressed by sending his Son Jesus to live and serve as a Galilean speaking directly to the common people; promising to bless those who met the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and prisoner; and finally meeting death on a cross as a political offender". The good news handed on to the Church is that God's grace was in Jesus Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor 8:1f) (Ibid). In article 4 of the Confession of Belhar, the discourse is almost iden-

tical in identifying God as the God of the needy and the poor in a special way and calling upon the Church to follow suit.

And of course our theological reflection is a matter not only of reading the Bible, but also of reinterpreting tradition. For that matter, what was the mind of Calvin on issues relating to the poor and the rich?

Planning

In concluding the portion on the pastoral cycle and indeed the article as such, the remaining issue is the development of strategies feeding into our insertion, context analysis and theological reflection. A new confessing movement does not, however, need the type of strategic planning that has become fashionable in the corporate world of big business and big capital and religious bodies. What is needed is an ongoing praxis of solidarity with the struggles of the poor. In the language of the Melbourne report:

The poor are already in mission to change their situation. What is required from the churches is a missionary movement that supports what they have already begun, and that focuses on building evangelizing and witnessing communities of the poor that will discover and live out expressions of faith among the masses of the poor and oppressed (Matthey 1980:177).

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